

NEWS RELEASE

**OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS**

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For Immediate Release

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Ronald J. Tenpas, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois, announced today that late in the afternoon on March 23, 2005, **STEVE JONES**, age 39, was found guilty after a 5-day trial in federal court in East St. Louis, Illinois, of conspiracy to distribute 50 grams or more of cocaine, in the form of cocaine base commonly known as “crack” cocaine, in violation of Title 21, United States Code, Section 846 (Count 1), and aiding and abetting the sale of a firearm to a convicted felon, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 922(d)(1) (Count 2).

The offenses took place from August 2002 through November 20, 2002, in Randolph and St. Clair Counties, and in Chicago, Illinois. During this time frame, the defendant was incarcerated at Menard Correctional Center. The defendant along with co-defendant, Menard Correctional Officer, Michael Poenitske, conspired to buy and sell crack cocaine and to sell firearms to recently paroled felons. The defendant arranged for Correctional Officer Poenitske to purchase crack cocaine from his drug sources in Chicago, Illinois. Intelligence Officers with the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) discovered defendant and Poenitske’s operations while monitoring inmate telephone conversations. IDOC officials contacted the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms after learning that the defendant and Poenitske were planning to sell firearms to recently paroled felons. ATF and IDOC officials recruited a parolee to act as a confidential source and purchase a firearm from Poenitske. This sale took place on October 15, 2002. Additionally, this confidential source set up drug transactions with the defendant’s drug sources in Chicago. Agents with the Drug Enforcement Administration assisted ATF agents in purchasing crack

cocaine from Toby Jones, the defendant's cousin, and Byron Sutton. These undercover operations took place on November 20, 2002. Byron Sutton and Toby Jones were also charged in the conspiracy. Both Toby Jones and Sutton pled guilty and Toby Jones testified at trial against the defendant. Michael Poenitske also pled guilty to the charges and testified at trial.

The defendant faces a sentence of from 10 years to life imprisonment, a \$4 million fine, and 5 years supervised release on Count 1, and not more than 10 years imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, and at least 3 years supervised released on Count 2. The defendant's sentencing hearing is set for June 17, 2005.

ATF Special Agent Daniel Owens and Donald Enloe with the Illinois Department of Corrections were primarily responsible for investigating this case. Both Owens and Enloe testified at trial. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Deirdre A. Durborow.